Amendments to the Claims:

Claims 1-16.(Cancelled).

17.(**Currently Amended**) A method of operating a combustion system having ~~an electrostatic precipitator (ESP) and a selective catalytic reduction (SCR) system~~ **stack** to lower the acid dewpoint temperature of **the** flue gas ~~and optimize ESP function~~, the method comprising the steps of:

~~a) determining if the SCR system is to be by-passed;~~

~~b) by-passing the SCR system if the SCR system is determined to be by-passed;~~

~~c)~~ partially combusting the fuel in a first stage to create a chemically reducing environment in situ;

~~d)~~ adjusting the reducing environment for a sufficient time period such that the flue gas acid dewpoint **temperature** is lowered to a ~~desirable level~~ **temperature lower than the temperature of flue gas traveling through the stack** by reducing SO_3 formed during combustion to SO_2 by electron addition ~~to create an SO_3 concentration configured to improve ESP function~~; and;

~~e)~~ combusting the remainder of the fuel and combustion intermediates in a second stage with **an** oxidizing environment~~, wherein residence time in the oxidizing environment is selected to maintain the SO_3 concentration substantially within a range desirable for ESP function;~~

~~thereby lowering the acid dewpoint temperature of the flue gas by reducing the acid concentration of the flue gas and optimizing ESP function~~.

18.(**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 17, ~~further~~ including the step of micro-staging the first stage fuel combustion.

19.(Original) The method of claim 18, wherein the micro-staging is provided through the use of low-NOx burners.

20.(**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 17, ~~further~~ including the step of macro-staging the first stage of fuel combustion.

21.(Original) The method of claim 20, wherein the macro-staging is provided through the use of over-fired air.

22.(**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 17, ~~further~~ including a combination of micro-staging and macro-staging.

23.(Original) The method of claim 22, wherein the micro-staging is provided by low-NOx burners and the macro-staging is provided by over-fired air.

24.(Original) The method of claim 17, wherein the fuel is coal.

25.(**Currently Amended**) A method of operating a combustion system **to decrease the acid dewpoint temperature of its flue gas to a temperature lower than the temperature of flue gas traveling through a stack of the combustion system** ~~having an electrostatic precipitator (ESP) and a selective catalytic reduction (SCR) system,~~ the method comprising the steps of:

~~a)~~ partially combusting the fuel in a first stage to create a chemically reducing environment in situ;

~~b)~~ combusting the remainder of the fuel and combustion intermediates in a second stage with oxidizing environment;

~~c)~~ measuring the acid dewpoint of the flue gas;

measuring the temperature of the flue gas traveling through the stack;

~~d) determining if the SCR system is in operation;~~

~~e)~~ ~~if the SCR system is not in operation,~~ **if the measured acid dewpoint temperature is higher than the measured flue gas temperature,** adjusting the reducing environment for a sufficient time period such that SO_3 formed during combustion is reduced to SO_2 by electron addition to ~~create an SO_3 concentration configured to improve~~

~~ESP function; thereby~~ decreas~~e~~ing the acid dewpoint temperature of the flue gas ~~and optimizing ESP function~~.

26.(**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 25, ~~further~~ including the step of micro-staging the first stage fuel combustion.

27.(Original) The method of claim 26, wherein the micro-staging is provided through the use of low-NOx burners.

28.(**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 25, ~~further~~ including the step of macro-staging the first stage of fuel combustion.

29.(Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the macro-staging is provided through the use of over-fired air.

30.(**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 25, ~~further~~ including a combination of micro-staging and macro-staging.

31.(Original) The method of claim 30, wherein the micro-staging is provided by low-NOx burners and the macro-staging is provided by over-fired air.

32.(Original) The method of claim 25, wherein the fuel is coal.

33. (**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 17, wherein SO_3 concentration is adjusted to about 15 to 20 ppm **at an ESP component of the combustion system, thereby optimizing ESP function**.

34.(**Currently Amended**) The method of claim 25, wherein SO_3 concentration is adjusted to about 15 to 20 ppm **at an ESP component of the combustion system, thereby optimizing ESP function**.